

Re:Focus

simple ideas to help you thrive

by Simon Sinek

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The better claim

“Our standards beat their extras,” read the headline on the brochure. The body copy below elaborated, “the most legroom in coach,” it said.

When I read the claim on the jetBlue in-flight brochure, I, like most people, thought when they said “the most legroom in coach” that they meant that they actually have the most legroom in coach. Until, that is, I read the fine print: “Based on the average fleet-wide seat pitch of U.S. airlines.” In other words, jetBlue does not, in fact, have the “most” legroom in coach and their standards do not beat others’ extras. More accurately, based on their own legal type, jetBlue beats everyone else’s average. The facts, it seems, render their claim of “most” a bit of an exaggeration. Though the claim may have been “legally” or “technically” true, they are misleading. Manipulative. And this is the problem with absolute claims; they are, at best, rubbish, and, at worst, manipulative.

Sadly, this is not exclusive to jetBlue. It is, in fact, more common than most companies would like to admit. It’s amazing how many businesses claim to be the “best,” offer the “most” or be the “strongest,” when they aren’t. For one, such absolute claims are nearly impossible to verify. The best or the most is a very high standard...the highest, in fact. It means that not a single other company offers a single measurable unit that would make them even the slightest bit better. And even if the claim is true...for most companies it’s unsustainable for very long because competition has a funny way of...well... competing. In other words, claiming you’re best isn’t best...claiming your better, however, is much better.

Firstly, a claim of “better” can in fact be true without any need to slice numbers or make legal disclaimers, which makes them more credible. More importantly, by being better, it suggests that the company is constantly working to improve. And that’s always better. For example, if I claimed I was the best doctor in the country, you wouldn’t believe me. For one, how can I prove it? In contrast, if I said I was a better doctor than most doctors in the country, not only is it more believable, but I can also say, “and I’m always working to get even better.” If I were the best, there would be no room for improvement. And who wants a doctor who thinks they are the best? Wouldn’t we rather have one who is striving to be better? So why would the companies we do business with be any different?

I know I've been beating up on jetBlue lately. I don't have anything against them, per se. I guess I'm just disappointed how a company that used to be better became a company that is just average but is claiming to be the best. And to convince us they are the "best" they focused on finding numbers or comparisons that let them legally make their claim as opposed to focusing on working on actually being better again. Now that I think about it, that sounds like a description of most companies today.

Companies that claim to be the best rarely are. Companies that strive to be better, almost always are.